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Gender and naming practices, and the creation of a taxonomy of masculinities in the South African soap opera *The Queen*

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The field of scholarly inquiry lying at the intersection of onomastics and gender studies is one that is under-researched. Seeking to contribute to emerging debates on how names and naming practices shape the construction and perception of gender identities, this article examines the naming practices in the soap opera *The Queen*, and how these help to understand different forms of masculinities. By bringing onomastic and gender perspectives into the conversation, this article contends that naming practices in *The Queen* are important signifying constructs that possess an elocutionary force of validating and invalidating different expressions of masculinity. The taxonomy of masculinities that *The Queen* proposes makes it possible to examine how certain masculinities are deemed more masculine than others. The names of the characters, together with their corporeal deployment, allow for a rethinking of what it means to be male or a man in post-apartheid South Africa.

Introduction

Gender is not an attribute that human beings are born with. The French feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir (1973), rightly explains that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one. Butler takes up this idea and expands it further, explaining that gender is a stylised repetition of actions and bodily deployments that are considered socially correct based on the biological sex of an individual. According to Butler (1993: 21), gender performativity needs to be understood as the

> effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchised under constraint. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualised repetition of norms, and this repetition of norms constitutes the temporalised scene of gender construction and destabilisation.

Heteropatriarchal societies have often framed gender identities as a binary of masculine and feminine. Such framing considers gender identities that do not neatly fit into this binary as deviant and therefore incorrect.

This article focuses on the performance of masculinity and it builds upon a burgeoning body of scholarship that locates itself at the intersection of gender and onomastic studies. Numerous studies have previously shown that names unwittingly carry with them diverse forms of social and cultural baggage (Wamitila 1999; Rapoo 2002; Ngubane 2013; Ncube 2016). Proper names as well as nicknames, I will argue in this article, serve to reinforce stereotypes of how we perceive gender and sexual identities. Through an analysis of naming practices in the South African soap opera *The Queen*, which airs on the channel Mzansi Magic, I contend that proper names and nicknames of male

characters are not only indexical of the bearer's personality, but also constitute their social, gender and sexual identity. The title of the soap opera suggests that the protagonist is a woman. Although the soap opera focuses on a female character, this protagonist is surrounded by male characters to whom she is related and with whom she interacts. The plot is certainly propelled by the male characters and their actions.

Beyond an examination of names and their meanings and how these parallel the personalities of the bearers, my particular focus is on how names and nicknames in the soap opera are discursive elements that make it possible to understand how genders are constructed and perceived, especially in predominantly patriarchal societies. The names and nicknames used in *The Queen* show that there is a hegemonic and revered form of masculinity that is framed against a multiplicity of other forms of masculinity that do not fit neatly into the traditionally reified form of masculinity and manhood. These "othered" forms of masculinity challenge the hegemonic masculinity and show that masculinity is not a single, static and homogenous phenomenon, but rather one that is multifaceted, fluid and perpetually in a state of construction, reconstruction, negotiation and renegotiation.

I begin by giving a brief theoretical foregrounding of masculinity, especially in the sociocultural space of contemporary South Africa. Thereafter, I offer a presentation of different male characters and their names and the types of masculinity that they represent. Thereafter, I endeavour to think through this taxonomy of masculinities, particularly how certain masculinities seem to be viewed as more correct, and therefore desirable, than others. I also attempt to grapple with this process of valorising and validating some forms of masculinities, while others are looked down upon. I ultimately examine the underlying factors that lead to such consideration and grading of different masculinities. Specifically, I am interested in how different male characters negotiate their masculinity and how the names and nicknames that they have are important to how they construct and perceive of their masculinity and the masculinities of other male characters.

Contextualising masculinity and the intersection of gender and onomastic studies

To understand and make sense of masculinity in contemporary South Africa, it is important and indeed inevitable to briefly contextualise masculinity, especially against the effects of apartheid and its aftermath. My particular interest is in black masculinities, which are currently viewed as not only toxic. but also destructive and antisocial (Dube 2016). Understanding this current state of black masculinity is indeed a complex undertaking that requires careful nuancing and historical contextualisation.

Biko (1978: 130–131) explains the hardships that black men underwent during apartheid:

> The black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure, and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position. Deep inside him, his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he averts it in the wrong direction – on his fellow black man in the township, on the property of black people…All in all, the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated and drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

Biko shows how white masculinity subdued black masculinity and reduced it to an empty shell. Langa et al. (2018: 9) point out in this regard that "black men were positioned as 'boys' and black masculinity as inferior to white masculinity". The infantilisation of black men has had the adverse effect of compelling men to forcefully attempt to impose their masculinity. The natural victims of the forceful exhibitions of masculinity have been women and children. Gqola (2015: 157) explains quite pertinently in this regard that

> this claim to recover from emasculation very often requires the performance of hypermasculinity

> that women are expected to support as part of enabling these men to attain manhood. In some of its most brutal manifestations, it directly trivialises sexual violence by these men.

The violence against women is in this sense seen as a way through which infantilised and emasculated black men seek to regain their masculinity and manhood.

In examining masculinities, it is worth being cognisant of, as highlighted by Ratele (2008: 521), "the pressures males are subjected to or subject themselves to in respect to their bodies, behaviours or habits". Although masculinity continues to be idealised in African societies as is the case in many patriarchal societies, it should be considered that masculinity and being male/man does indeed come with diverse forms of cultural and societal baggage and expectations. These expectations have a direct effect on how men behave and relate to other men and, more importantly, women.

Moving on to how onomastics and gender studies intersect, I would like to underscore that in Africa given names are significant and come embedded with layers of sociocultural significance and description. Ngubane (2013: 168) justly acknowledges that in Africa "an individual is not considered a human being until a name is bestowed, for giving a name is the acknowledgement of the existence of that particular human being". This suggests that one enters existence only when a name has been bestowed upon one. Cekiso and Meyiwa (2014: 81) also explain that when one is given a name, there is a need to "live up to the expectations of their names". This point highlights that a given name is not only a way of identifying a person, but rather that a person, in the way they live and relate to others, needs to live up to the dictates of his or her name. Madubuike (1976: 13–14) also elucidates this line of thinking by saying that

> [n]ames given to people have definite meanings, and parents, relatives and well-wishers are very conscious when choosing the names of their children or of an individual. Thus names are not merely labels or simply tags which the individual carries along with him. They have a deep social significance and many names studied collectively express a world view, the *Weltanschauung* of the people.

Madubuike explains that names are more than just tags that are given to people when they are born. On the contrary, names have profound meanings which, in many instances, express a communal world view. Through names, it is possible to view how a group of people lives, thinks, views the world and relates to its environs and to divinity.

In African contexts, names and naming practices play a role that is more than just labelling the name bearer. Suzman (1994: 253) points out, in the case of South Africa, that "in Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, and many other cultures, name givers traditionally chose personal names that pointed to a range of people and circumstances that were relevant at the time of the child's birth". In so doing, names allow an individual to be defined and determined in relation to the collective. Chauke (2015: 303) also concurs that in traditional African societies,

> naming practices are very important since names are often given to mark the testimony of what a society holds dear in a given community. In other words, names bear testimony to the history and culture of a particular nation or people.

Such reasoning highlights that names and naming practices cannot be separated from the symbolic function that they have in ensuring an individual's relationship to space, culture and time.

Nicknames, like personal names, are important in giving meaning to an individual's existence and the way they relate to others and indeed their sociocultural milieu. De Klerk and Bosch (1996) offer an examination of the intersection of nicknames and sex-role stereotypes. De Klerk and Bosch (1996: 525) argue that "conventions regarding nickname coinage and usage are intimately connected to the gender of bearers and users". They further contend that nicknames

> have the consequence of reinforcing the character of certain relationships and social attitudes, reminding everyone of the attributes of the bearer and creating expectations which affect perceptions, even if (often) inaccurately, and this can be particularly influential with regard to the perpetuation of gender-related stereotypes (de Klerk and Bosch 1996: 526).

These thoughts are especially relevant to the present study in which I argue that personal names and nicknames have the potential to assess and assign gender identities to individuals by prefixing certain behavioural characteristics. Names, as the most rudimentary of identifying elements, possess the potential for compelling a name bearer to act in a particular way. The denotations and inferences that are embedded in names can characterise how a person acts. My focus in this article is on how names of male characters in the soap opera *The Queen* characterise their masculinity and how they ultimately act and relate to other characters. There appears to be a deliberate attempt by the creators of this soap opera to ensure that the male characters live up to the names and nicknames that they have been given. In the ensuing section, I will examine the relationship between names and nicknames and the kinds of masculinities that are performed by the characters.

Masculinities presented in *The Queen*

The soap opera *The Queen* centres on two families that are involved in drug trafficking. Although the title of the soap opera might suggest that the action focuses on female characters, it is in fact on men and different kinds of masculinities that the plot concentrates. This soap opera is particularly interesting for its depiction of what it means to be a man in post-apartheid South Africa, across different generational and class settings. I will briefly look at the names and nicknames of these male characters and the forms of masculinity that they represent.

Traditional masculinity

Everitt-Penhale and Ratele (2015: 5) posit that traditional masculinity is often framed "as the opposite of 'modern'; as inherently negative and patriarchal; and at times rather confusingly, as synonymous with hegemonic masculinity". Hegemonic masculinity, on the other hand, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 832)

> embodie[s] the currently most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men.

Traditional masculinity thus assigns men substantial social and symbolic power. Such apportionment of power is effected through the domination of women. Everitt-Penhale and Ratele (2015: 9) point out that although the term "traditional" might be construed as being pejorative, it is used "to alternatively indicate the legitimacy of certain gendered practices or beliefs". In the case of South Africa, the process of retribalisation served to entrench racialised stereotypes on African genders and sexualities. Ratele (2013: 138) pertinently explains in this line of thinking that

> in retribalising black life, all black men are made out to be – not to put too fine a point on it – rampant, warrior-like heterosexuals, and all African women as willing, submissive sexual objects of the men of the tribe.

It is thus important to consider traditional masculinities to be wary of the trap of generalising and painting them with a single monolithic brush stroke.

Brutus Shakespeare Khoza represents one form of traditional masculinity in the soap opera *The Queen*. His name implies that the form of masculinity that he represents is one that is brute in its demeanour. This brute masculinity finds its mainstay in the reproduction of traditional perceptions of

gender relations and gendered roles. This aspect of tradition is highlighted mainly through the clan names that are often used to refer to him: "*Hlase, Mkhathini, Bhovungane, Mlilo, Gumede, Sokhabase, Mangena, Zingelwayo, Khoza*". Guma (2001: 274) asserts that the reciting of clan names expresses more than the genealogical lineage of a person; it reflects authority and "invariably clarifies the status of hierarchy of the individual". The clan names can also be considered as "semantic referents… that articulate a sense of masculinity" through the fact that they make claim to power and prowess (Meintjes 2004: 187). This cultural practice of reciting clan names is thus pivotal in the creation of traditional masculinity. Ratele et al. (2010) attest that traditional and cultural practices are central to the construction of masculinity. They contend that the overriding objective of such traditional practices is "to produce or reproduce the structural superiority of males over females and of some males over other males in a society" (Ratele et al. 2010: 558). Names and naming practices therefore play an important role in the way in which men are perceived and the way in which they construct their masculinity.

The character of Jabulani, nicknamed Mjekejeke, offers a different image of traditional masculinity. Jabulani (literally translated as "be happy" or "celebrate") is a man who has moved from his rural home in Kwazulu-Natal to Johannesburg in search of better opportunities. Like Brutus, he is a traditional man who sees the need for a man to be the head of the household. What is interesting about the traditional masculinity exhibited by Jabulani is the fact that he is completely controlled by his wife. Although he has the symbolic power of the head of the family, Jabulani does not have any real social power. As is suggested by his name, Jabulani is happy with the life that he leads and the type of masculinity that he has. Jabulani is happy and comfortable in his own skin and in his manhood.

"Militarised" masculinity

Brutus' nephew, Shaka Khoza, represents a very violent form of traditional masculinity. The very fact of this character being named after one of the greatest military minds South Africa has ever produced, Shaka Zulu, compels me to go as far as calling this violent manifestation of manhood "militarised" masculinity. Gqola (2015), in her seminal book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, explains the functioning of this violent form of masculinity, particularly in the sociocultural space of post-apartheid South Africa. Gqola (2015: 152) posits that

> [v]iolent masculinities create a public space consciousness in which violence is not just acceptable and justified, but also natural and desirable. They glamorise violence in a variety of masking manoeuvres that seduce spectators into mythologising violence.

The character of Shaka Khoza is presented as a serial womaniser who does not hesitate to pull out his gun, if I can use an allusion to Jacob Zuma's "*umshini wam*" (my gun), at the slightest of provocations. Gqola (2015) pertinently shows that this violent form of masculinity often goes hand in hand with exhibitions of hypermasculinity. She asserts that "hypermasculinity is a heightened claim to patriarchal manhood, to aggression, strength and sexuality. It is effectively manhood on metaphoric steroids" (2015: 154). Shaka's violent hypermasculinity is expressed by the denigration and objectification of women. In one scene of an episode of *The Queen*, Shaka emphatically explains how he will pounce on women for his own sexual pleasure: "*I'm talking slender, big mama, beautiful, ugly, big-headed or big nosed, as long as you're a woman, I'll sleep with you. I'm going all out. No more time for games*". The vocabulary that Shaka uses attests to his militarised masculinity. Words such as *ukuhlaba*, translated in the soapie as "to sleep with", reflect a disturbingly violent masculinity. The verb *ukuhlaba* gives the image of stabbing. The choice of vocabulary also highlights the way in which the sexual act is used as a weapon of violence.

Shaka Khoza perpetually asserts his masculinity through the violence that he is able to inflict through fighting and through verbal abuse. He achieves this by dominating women and also looking down upon other masculinities that he deems inferior to his own.

Sober masculinity

Shaka's stepbrother, Kagiso Melusi Khoza is often nicknamed *Sgaqagaqa* or "Tough guy". Sgaqagaqa embodies a tough and yet sober form of masculinity. Unlike Shaka and Brutus, Kagiso is highly educated and was in the army. Although he does also use violence, Sgaqagaqa's violence is rarely ever towards women. I refer to Sgaqagaqa as representing a sober masculinity because he is often able to control the displays of hypermasculinity that are exhibited by his uncle and stepbrother. In many instances, Shaka and Brutus tell Sgaqagaqa to be a man and to free himself from his mother's influence. This suggests that for him to be considered a man he needs to be independent of his close relationship to his mother. Instead of being eternally under the protection of his mother, Sgaqagaqa is required to assume the symbolic function of his second name *Melusi* (shepherd). The name Melusi suggests that he should live up to his name by being able to take up a position of leadership and responsibility that is required of a man.

There, however, seems to be a discord between the nickname Sgaqagaqa and the way in which he relates to women. Although physically tough, he is presented as emotionally soft in his relationship to women in his family as well as women with whom he is romantically involved. He does not conform to the hegemonic standards of masculinity that require that he be superior to women. Sgaqagaqa is in many instances controlled by women and this gives the vision of a form of masculinity that accepts being emotionally vulnerable. Ncube (2015: 46) posits that "the construction of masculinity also centre[s] on the feminisation of emotions such as love, as men are expected to be self-determining, dispassionate and emotionally distant". Contrary to such expectations, Sgaqagaqa allows himself to be emotional even as he strives to assert himself as a man.

Gay masculinities or homo-masculinities

South African soap operas have been important in offering representation of non-normative sexual identities. From the soap opera *Generations*, which screened openly gay characters for the first time on South African television, soap operas have made it possible to imagine and make visible sexual identities that are often marginalised in South Africa, in spite of the comprehensive protections that are offered by the South African constitution.

The Queen presents three male characters that are openly not straight: Kgosi, Prince, and Schumacher, who is bisexual. Concerning Kgosi and Prince, their names certainly identify and frame them as men. Both Kgosi (King) and Prince are names that refer to some form of nobility. However, other male characters, especially Brutus and Shaka, denigrate their masculinity. Kgosi is nicknamed "Bhudi-Sisi" (male-brother), while Prince is often referred to as "Princess". Gay masculinity through such nicknaming is feminised and rendered less masculine. The thinking of the hypermasculine characters seems to be that to be a gay man equals being a woman.

What is ironic, in the case of Brutus, is that he finds out that his first-born son, Bhekumuzi, is himself gay. The name Bhekumuzi is an apt name in as far as heteropatriarchal dictates of gender go. *Bhekumuzi* literally means "look after the home" and shows the importance that is placed on male children. Bhekumuzi is not only expected to look after and guard the home, but he is also expected to ensure the survival of the family name. His family are erroneously convinced that Bhekumuzi's sexual orientation implies that he will not be able to have children who would themselves ensure the future

survival of the family and its name. In so doing, Bhekumuzi unwittingly challenges heteropatriarchy, which reduces individuals to their reproductive functions and nothing more.

The character nicknamed Schumacher shows a different kind of masculinity. The nickname, possibly an allusion to the German Formula 1 driver, can be explained as referencing the speed with which his sexual and gender identity fluctuates. The character of Schumacher is interested in both men and women, especially those who have money. His gender identity fluctuates and is never stable. In fact, these different masculinities of Schumacher, Kgosi and Prince are important in challenging the heteropatriarchal definitions of what masculinity should be and what being a man should involve. In so doing, this emergent masculinity intrepidly defies and intently interrogates often monolithic definitions of gender identities. What should be noted about the masculinities embodied by Schumacher, Kgosi and Prince is that by challenging feminising naming practices, they frame themselves not as inferior to hegemonic and dominant forms of masculinity. Quite the reverse, as these homo-masculinities breaks down gender and identity stereotypes, they position themselves as phenomena that are complete in their own ways and in no way inferior to the socioculturally idealised masculinity, which has affirmed itself as possessing a mystical dominance and omnipotence.

Conclusion

These names and nicknames used in the soap opera *The Queen* point to how certain masculinities are deemed more masculine than others. This implies that there are some masculinities that are more desirable than others. This desirability of certain masculinities is founded on what is viewed by patriarchs and homophobes as the natural and correct way in which men are expected to behave and to use their bodies.

From the hypermasculine to the feminised, names and nicknames allow us to examine how male protagonists are categorised based on their corporeal deployment. Male bodies that deviate from what can be termed the hegemonic conception of masculinity are naturally framed as being less than masculine, in other words feminine. Wamitila (1999: 36) appropriately affirms that names and nicknames "besides individualising the characters, have important semantic, pragmatic, allusive and symbolic imports". In *The Queen*, names and nicknames are symbolically charged and embedded with deeper meanings that make it possible to understand how masculinities are constructed and how they relate to other masculinities and to femininities.

The question to ask though is what criteria are used to create a taxonomy of the different forms of masculinity and how some masculinities are validated, while others are invalidated. I contend that names frame themselves as critical praxes through which masculinities are projected. More than characterising their bearers, names make it possible to think about and think through how masculinities come into being. One therefore needs to look beyond and dig deeper than the surface meaning of the names that are given to male characters in the soap opera *The Queen*.

I have shown in this article that names, nicknames and naming practices have an important role to play in how masculinities are constructed. Naming practices make it possible to imagine diverse forms of masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa. Such imagining is enabled and facilitated by the symbolic functioning of names and naming practices, particularly in the fictitious world of the soap opera *The Queen*. Even though the soap opera is indeed a work of fiction, it shows that by accounting for the connections and the differences in how names construct men and masculinity, it is conceivable to escape the stumbling block of considering males as a homogenous cluster and constructing masculinity as a destructive and static set of behavioural and social traits and ways of being.

I conclude by pointing out that a lot more work certainly needs to be done in order to better understand how naming practices can account for how genders, not just masculinity, are constructed and come into being. Whether it involves examining works of fiction such as literature or films, the African continent certainly offers a considerable corpus of material with which to work.

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